

# Curtain Up Theater Review by Camille Bounds: “Annie Jr” is a complete delight

by [Camille Bounds](#) | Apr 23, 2018

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“Annie Jr.” breezes into Morgan Hill with the push and shove of a small hurricane. Seems every kid with talent has showed up for this one and they all deliver with gusto and liveliness. over thirty youngsters from it seems four to 12 plays an orphan or part of the mansion staff with great enthusiasm.

As director Colleen Blanchard attends to the littlest detail with the kids with Jennifer Grifall’s lively choreography and with what they do on stage brings an organized offering that is a delight to watch. Talented Tegan Leong handles the role of Annie with competence and gives it the sensitivity needed to feel for the never-say-die, optimistic character. She carries the role with the confidence of a pro. She brings in the signature song “Tomorrow” and “Maybe” with a maturity that runs beyond her years.

Leah Grifall and Grace Farrell, Oliver Kaelin as Rooster Hannigan, James Tuttle as Oliver Warbucks, Makayla Holberg as Lily St. Regis and Isabella Rosal as Miss Hannigan all give great support.

Of course, there is Sandy, Annie’s endearing dog played by Mason Grifall and Bailey Tom who share the role, a couple of loveable golden labs that we wished we could have seen more of but I was told the dog union would not let them appear more than they did.

Titled as master carpenter in the program, Larry Tom makes magic with his solid, safe sets that bring realism to the scenes with the assistance of Colleen Blanchard, Jason Leong, Jared DeRosa, Roger Traverso, and Alex Salvatti. Costume designer Cathy Tom and Costumer Terri Hendrix as usual dress the cast with their sure touch of the time and place.

Annie Jr. has been taken from the Harold Gray comic strip character “Little Orphan Annie.” The story takes place in the ‘30s during the Great Depression with Annie as its centerpiece looking for her parents displaying her optimism and heart under the direst of circumstances. With memorable music by Charles Strouse and lyrics by Martin Charnin and book by Thomas Meehan the show is easy to listen to and enjoy.



# South Valley

## A hard-knock life

### Student cast prepares with vocal coaches and choreography

April 13, 2018 - Susan Rife

<http://southvalley.com/SVCT-a-hard-knock-life/>



ROWDY KIDS South Valley Civic Theatre's 2018 cast of 'Annie Jr.' rehearses for its Friday, April 20 debut.  
Photo: Jason Leong

The cast of the South Valley Civic Theatre's production of the musical "Annie Jr." is made up entirely of young people—and two dogs.

Golden retrievers Bailey, 6, and Mason, 5, will share the crucial role of the title character's canine companion Sandy.

At a rehearsal recently at the organization's warehouse off Joleen Street in Morgan Hill, producer Kathy Tom exhorted the children in the cast not to play or otherwise interact with the canine actors, whose focus needs to be entirely on Tegan Leong, playing the role of Annie.

"We want our dogs to do just as good a job as you do," said Tom. "If you distract them, they're not going to say 'Never mind, I'm working.' No hands, no petting. You say 'oh yeah, there's a dog' and walk away from it."

Earlier in the rehearsal, before the entire cast had arrived, Tegan worked with Bailey, who happens to be Tom's pet, on the beginning of the show's signature tune, "Tomorrow." Bailey needed to be summoned from hiding out of view of the dogcatcher (played temporarily by Tegan's mother, Liana), and then come to Tegan after being called by the name Sandy.

It was a balancing act for everyone.

"The biggest problem is when we have a lot more people around; I'm thinking of the audience," said Tom.

Bailey, with a golden's friendly smile and wagging tail, did as commanded, as well as practicing his entrance of crossing from stage right to stage left in silhouette behind a scrim.

Dog trainer Sherry Boyer was on hand to give advice.

"The dog is a character and we have to give him his space," she said.

Tegan, who is 13, is a veteran of SVCT shows, having first performed in "Oliver Twist" when she was 9. "Annie Jr." is her first starring role.

"It's difficult, very difficult," she said, "to have a character who's on stage 90 percent of the time." Tegan, a seventh grade student at Oakwood School, has been working with a private vocal coach to strengthen her singing.

Opposite Tegan on the experience level is James Tuttle as Daddy Warbucks. A seventh grade student at Britton Middle School, James said he was "uneasy" with the singing at first but now is "pretty comfortable" with it. He also plays trumpet during the show's overture.

He was encouraged by his mother to audition for the show. It's too soon to say, however, whether he'll stick with acting, although he's enjoying the Daddy Warbucks style.

"I like that basically I'm the man of the house. If I want to do something, I can do it," he said.

The show, designed to be acted entirely by children, is a trimmed-down version of the Broadway musical "Annie," with music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Martin Charmin and book by Thomas Meehan. It's about 90 minutes long versus the 2-½ hours of the full-length show, but the basics are all there: a rowdy crop of orphans, the dog, the well-known songs.

It's ideal for community theater troupes because it allows "as many kids to find themselves on stage as possible," said Tom. "We're just hoping to give the kids a good theatrical experience."

*"Annie Jr." South Valley Civic Theatre. April 20-May 12 at Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road, Morgan Hill. Tickets \$16-\$25. [svct.org](http://svct.org); 800.838.3006.*

# 'Annie Jr.' comes to South Valley Civic Theatre stage this month

<http://morganhilllife.com/2018/04/06/entertainment-annie-jr-comes-to-south-valley-civic-theatre-stage-this-month/>

## Oakwood 7th-grader Tegan Leong plays "spunky" title role

by [Marty Cheek](#) | Apr 6, 2018

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Everyone's favorite redheaded orphan finds herself making friends and facing adventures as she searches for her parents in the musical "Annie Jr." opening April 20 in the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Oakwood School seventh-grader Tegan Leong plays the spunky title character in the South Valley Civic Theatre's children's version of the Tony Award-winning show. She's accompanied on the stage by two golden retrievers, Bailey and Mason, who alternate between shows playing the role of the stray mutt Sandy.



Tegan Leong with "Sandy" at a rehearsal of "Annie Jr." The South Valley Civic Theatre show opens April 20 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Photo by Marty Cheek

With equal measures of pluck and positivity, Leong as the little orphan charms her way into people's hearts in 1930s New York City. Annie is determined to find her mother and father who abandoned her years ago on the doorstep of an orphanage run by a mean-spirited woman named Miss Hannigan (played by Isabella Rosal). With Sandy's help, Annie eventually foils Miss Hannigan's cruel machinations, finding a new home and family in billionaire Oliver Warbucks (played by James Tuttle) and his personal secretary, Grace Farrell (played by Leah Grifall).

"The show is amazing," Leong said. "It's such a challenging role because Annie has so many different sides to her. She's angry, happy, and sad. It's a new experience for me and I love it."

This is the second time the 13-year-old has played an orphan in an SVCT show. She got her start on the stage playing the lost-in-London little boy Oliver in the children's musical "Oliver!" in 2014. Among her other performances, in 2015 she played the part of Mushu the dragon in "Mulan Jr." In 2016, she played the comical role of the red Jamaican crab Sebastian in "The Little Mermaid Jr."

Leong loves putting a vivacious energy into the role of Annie. The show won the Tony Award for Best Musical. Songs include hit tunes such as "Tomorrow" and "It's the Hard Knock Life."

"It's an old classic, and we love to breathe life into an old classic," Leong said. "Oh, my gosh! The whole theater experience is amazing. Everyone is working toward a goal, and it can't happen without everybody working together."

The character of Annie has a tremendous amount of intelligence and a can-do spirit disguising the unhappiness of an orphan, she said.

“She has a lot of spunk and energy, but underneath that all, she’s sad and she’s hanging in there. But she covers it up with her attitude,” she said. “She gets up and out there and she decides to continue going on for her friends and herself. She knows that if you just sit there and wallow in your sadness, that’s not going to take you anywhere.”

The SVCT version of the show will be a unique one because the director and producers have added “little quirks and tweaks” to keep the audience thoroughly entertained, she said.

“And they definitely need to come for the dog. Everybody loves dogs. He’s adorable,” she said. “Both dogs are really well trained. I hope it’ll go well for the dogs on stage.”

Leong enjoys making friends with other children playing Annie’s fellow orphans who must deal with the nastiness of Miss Hannigan. And she’s having fun performing with Tuttle as the cranky old Daddy Warbucks whom Annie eventually enchants, she said.

“Daddy Warbucks is a hard core solid, classic businessman who listens to no one,” she said. “Annie really gets to him because she’s not intimidated by him. As the play progresses, he suddenly starts softening up and he realizes, ‘Wow, this kid is OK. I like kids.’ It’s a good message.”